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ABSTRACT

Soccer can be described as a contact sport that demands physical readiness because by running on the soccer pitch you use all of your muscles. It is a sport which is played with a round shaped ball mostly made of synthetic leather to ensure its maximum durability and achieve the best feel for the ball. There are notable roots of this sport in 2nd century BC in China. It has become popular through the centuries and has developed to the highest development level. Female participation in this sport has officially begun in 19th century with forming of the first female soccer club called Dick, Kerr Ladies from Britain, which is also known for its unbeatable status. From its establishment, female soccer has suffered a few ungraceful bans which had a task to restrict women from the soccer community. The most notable ban is the one that came from FA (Football Association) and was in place between 1921 and 1971. After that ban, women's soccer has risen above it, starting from the first tournament named FIFA World Cup in 1991 in China and has not stopped yet. The women's national team which has been the most successful from its beginning is the national team of the USA. Other countries like Germany and England are also rushing to the top of the women's soccer. Despite prejudice, discrimination and earnings they obtain, female soccer players can be great and successful in soccer as well as their male counterparts. They are hard workers who play with a great passion towards kicking the ball and provide attractive sport energy.

Key words: Britain, female soccer, FIFA, prejudice, sport

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, women enter into sport activities a lot more than they did before and are becoming extraordinary athletes. One of the sports that have a major importance in their everyday life is female soccer. No matter the popularity of soccer in general and a huge audience supporting it, female soccer was and still is in the shadow of its male counterpart. This final paper is going to draw attention to the fact that women should not be neglected in this sport.

Soccer connects people, introduces different cultures, and like a real tourist, it travels and visits all lands with the intention of getting under everyone's skin. It started as a simple, ordinary game and a leisure activity, but has evolved and nowadays it can be put under the industrial sport branch as a professional job. Not only is it represented as a sport, but it is also a cultural trend. As we all might know, soccer has become the most important side thing in the world, in which the players can be individuals of any gender, age, race and orientation. From its early beginnings, soccer has mostly been made for men, while women were only observers. For centuries they had a secondary role in soccer, until the emancipation in the 19th century when it all changed. First clubs for women were established and they could show their knowledge and skills. It can be said that female soccer is relatively young compared to the male version. Looking at it from the global aspect, it has always been and remained a subject of studying and great interest.

This paper is divided into two parts. The soccer story begins with a description of the game, its history and historical development in the states like England, USA and Croatia. Success is a very important outcome in our society in a general sense, so the women's success on the pitch is an indispensable topic. Soccer is a team sport and some national teams like USA and Germany stand out from the rest of the world because of their remarkable quality. Like these two mentioned countries, other countries are also running towards the top of female soccer, together with some special female players who are world-famous for their records. The second part describes how female soccer is presented including all the problems concerning women running in the pitch. Both men and women are playing this sport by the same rules, although they differ in much, from popularity and media attention to the difference in pay, which they work for in this dynamic industry.

2. SOCCER AS A SPORT ACTIVITY

Soccer is a contact sport that demands physical readiness; running is the main dot and all of the muscles are used by playing soccer. Like its name says, soccer is usually played with legs, but also with any other part of the body, except with arms or hands. Only the goalkeeper is allowed to use hands because of his role in the game, which will be mentioned later in the work. Another feature connected to this sport is its relative cheapness, when it comes to a price for the needed equipment. Therefore, over 240 million people from all around the world are involved in soccer, according to the Federation Internationale de Football Association. Soccer can be called one of the simplest sports. Just as any other sport, this one also has its rules and although there are many, they are not complicated. It can be said that this sport is very available and one of the main activities of one's childhood. Soccer has made its way under people's skin, so that even those who do not play it support the players and track their progress (Downing, 2014).

Passion is the only thing that matters because it is the only thing that keeps you going. Women, men, boys and girls, no matter the age and origin, follow soccer. Speaking of universality of soccer, Oscar Wilde merged it all up once and said: „Football is all very well as a game for rough girls, but is hardly suitable for delicate boys“ (Riordan, 2001).

Because of its universality, soccer is a sport with which anyone, young or old, male or female, can occupy their time. The only precondition is to have passion and will for shooting and kicking the ball. The invention of television has helped a lot when it comes to keeping track of soccer, even in the most backwater places in the world (Gifford, 2002).

3. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SOCCER

Soccer, also known as football, began to develop in China in the 2nd and 3rd centuries BC. As the sport we know today, soccer has its origins in games like *Cuju*¹ from China, *Harpastum*² from ancient Rome and *Episkyros*³ from Greece. Each of these games involved a ball and a player, they were similar and they had set up great roots of today's soccer. (<https://www.thoughtco.com/who-invented-soccer-3556873>).

In the beginning soccer did not have any rules; there was no formal organization to control its evolution and there was an unequal number of individuals on the pitch who were trying to kick the ball and while doing that, they appeared to be very aggressive. It was allowed to do anything on the pitch and since there were no penalties for such an aggressive playstyle, the game turned out chaotic and pretty wild (<http://www.fifa.com/about-fifa/who-we-are/the-game/britain-home-of-football.html>).

Through the centuries, soccer has become very popular. However, there were times when it was banned. Because of its popularity and the fact that a lot of men would rather run after a ball and score goals than perform archery, soccer was banned in 1300s by Edward II, King of England. After a while, soccer started to grow again. But this was not the only ban which was trying to put soccer behind: King Edward III, Henry IV and Oliver Cromwell, an English soldier and statesman in the 16th century, also followed King Edward II's track. Nevertheless, all of these attempts to make soccer less valuable than other activities did not last long. Moreover, soccer got a big boost and has continued to grow more and more, making people associated and more sociable than they have ever been. It truly connected large groups of people so it can be said that soccer has become a strong addiction. During the Middle Ages, mostly in England, there was a popular game called Shrovetide football which was played annually on Shrove Tuesday⁴, a festival of eating pancakes. It is also known as "mob-football" and allowed people from neighbouring towns and villages to compete against each other (IntroBooks, 2016).

Britain can be called the home of soccer because there are some facts saying that modern soccer developed in this part of the world. As it was mentioned before, soccer did not

¹ Ancient Chinese game which literally means „kicking the ball“

² Ancient Roman game which was all about keeping the possession of a ball

³ Greek game, similar to *Harpastum*, more similar to today's sport called rugby

⁴ The day known as Pancake Day which is celebrated in UK, the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday

have any rules and it was a pretty chaotic game. Therefore, in the 19th century first rules and regulations started to evolve. 1863 is a famous year known for the establishment of the foundations of modern soccer. Football Association was formed in London and it provided first unified laws of soccer. The first rule was about the weight and the size of a soccer ball. After that, in the coming years new rules also came up. Because soccer had had a lot of similarities with rugby, establishment of these rules also managed to separate soccer from rugby. Unlike today's version of soccer, other players besides goalkeepers could pass the ball with their hands. Soccer started to grow in schools and during the time, schools initiated to compete against one another (<http://www.fifa.com/about-fifa/who-we-are/the-game/britain-home-of-football.html>).

Picture 1 *Medieval stages of a game mixed with elements of soccer and rugby*



Source: <http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-heaLMii3vvI/U2NEtLp1GGI/AAAAAAAAAGrU/KITIXEqc3JA/s320/afl.jpg>

2.2 History of female soccer

According to *Glasgow Herald*⁵, women started to play soccer in the late 19th century. To be specific, first female soccer match was played in 1881 in Edinburgh, the capital city of Scotland. It was an unofficial match between Scottish and English national teams which entertained a pretty huge crowd of more than thousand spectators. People were curious about what women are going to show on the soccer pitch. In the end, the result was 3:0 for the Scottish team. As historical evidence suggests, the woman who organized the competition was Helen Matthews, one of the *suffragettes*⁶ who was also a goalkeeper of the Scottish team. A week later, the return match was also held in Scotland, but it did not experience a lot of popularity like the previous one. Everyday life was dominated by men and women had a very hard task before them; they had a need to achieve equality between male and female gender. In Britain, it was very hard to evolve female soccer. Britain remained a “man’s world”, therefore there wasn’t much space for women to rise even though women outnumbered men (Tate, 2013).

Thanks to the movement of suffragettes, the world started to change. In early 20th century, women started to play soccer on a regular basis. The most notable event of females on the pitch happened in 1917 when women’s soccer club named Dick, Kerr Ladies played their first match. This also represents the beginning of British female soccer. Dick, Kerr Ladies is a British female soccer club which was formed in 1917 in Preston by its founder Dick & Kerr Company. Because it was an era of World War I, men were supposed to fight in the war and women were employed in factories in order to help by producing ammunition. Besides working in factories, women played soccer in their spare time and they were encouraged to engage in sport activities. On Christmas Day in 1917, they played against Arundel Coulthard Factory team and won 4:0 in front of 10,000 spectators. It was a match originally organized for collecting funds for injured soldiers in a hospital and it gathered a large audience. After that, this team became the most popular female soccer team and developed pretty quickly and successfully. After that, they won every single match they played. Another great historical evidence of fast-paced female British soccer dates to 1920. The same team played in Liverpool’s stadium Goodison Park against St. Helen’s Ladies in front of 53,000 people. The

⁵ One of the most popular Scottish daily newspapers

⁶ Female members of an organisation established in 19th Century who had fought for women's rights

numbers are real proof of a great growth of Dick, Kerr Ladies' popularity. Furthermore, because of their spectacular wins, they became international celebrities. Unfortunately, their reputation did not last for long.

In 1921, the FA (Football Association) banned female soccer and there were many reasons to put women down. The FA announced: "The game of football is quite unsuitable for females and ought not to be encouraged". Another reason was the fact that men's soccer matches could be threatened by women's popularity on pitches. Also, the FA sent an order to clubs which were members of the Association not to allow women to use their soccer pitches for playing soccer. All of that led to significant sinking of female soccer. Despite this official ban, some of the soccer clubs like Dick, Kerr Ladies existed for a while. What is more, Lilly Parr was the winger of the mentioned club and in 1937 became one of the greatest soccer players in the history of England. The famous FA ban was lifted by the FA itself in 1971. UEFA, the governing body for European soccer, pushed female soccer even further with the statement under which women's soccer had to be played under national associations in each European country. Consequently, female soccer started to recover from a very discouraging period of time. First tournaments started to evolve; the First European Championship was held in Sweden in 1984 and after that FIFA World Cup was organized in 1991 in China PR which was the first worldwide tournament of female soccer (<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-30329606>).

Picture 2 *First female soccer club Dick, Kerr Ladies*



Source https://ichef.bbci.co.uk/news/660/media/images/79634000/jpg/_79634801_dk3.jpg

2.3 History of female soccer in USA

Soccer has been played in the USA since they first organized the Women's League in 1951 in the North of St. Louis. This league consisted of 4 teams but lasted only for 2 seasons. It was the first indication of the birth of female soccer in the USA. In 1972 female soccer was pushed even further by the Title IX, which was an American Education Amendments Act of federal law. Under that law, women and men were starting to be equal when it comes to funding of soccer and could play soccer in colleges (<https://www.timetoast.com/timelines/womens-soccer-in-the-united-states>).

U.S. Women's National Team is the soccer women's national team in the USA. Officially, this soccer team started playing in 1985 with their first match in a tournament in Jesolo, Italy. It is a beach-side town in the province of Venice on the Adriatic Sea. Although they were playing casual soccer before the trip to Italy, nothing was notable about their achievements in soccer as a national team. They were not very successful in the tournament in Italy; they lost 3 of their 4 matches. But after that, everything changed. By 1989, they had played a total of 31 international matches. In 1990, they had extremely talented players like Michelle Akers, Mia Hamm, April Dawn Heinrichs and Carin Jennings, who were unstoppable machines on pitches. The U.S team showed their quality in the first FIFA World Cup for women held in China in 1991. They came out as champions by defeating Norway 2:1 in finals. With all of that, this national team will be remembered as the most successful one in the history of female soccer (Nash, 2016).

Picture 3 *Beginnings of female soccer in the USA*



Source

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.timetoast.com/public/uploads/photos/2544095/1950%20soccer.jpg?133571422>

2.4 History of female soccer in Croatia

Women in Croatia started to play soccer after the British soccer club Dick, Kerr Ladies was founded. The year 1937 is considered to be the year in which women began to form their own female soccer teams, primarily in Zagreb and Borovo. The person who established the first women's soccer team in Zagreb was Ivica Vidović, together with his colleagues and a professional guidance. In order to push soccer into the spotlight, Croatian soccer players played a few official matches against opponents from Austria.

Women's soccer remembers the unfounded discrimination of the former Ministry of Physical Education in Belgrade that made a decision not to support women's soccer and that it is a sport not appropriate for women. Because of that, from 1938 to 1970s there was almost no female interest for this kind of sport, and it is not a surprise that there is almost nothing to be noted for these years. Women's soccer reached its start and renewal in 1971. In the same year, the first championship was organized, in which the girls from ŽNK Merkur from Zagreb took the victory and became the first female Croatian Champions. After that, the championships continued to be organized, so 1980 was special for the occurrence of the official first league. Women from ŽNK Dinamo and Maksimir, both from Zagreb and women from ŽNK Osijek had the greatest success and development in the history of women's Croatian soccer. What is more, ŽNK Osijek is a team that competes in the First women's soccer league and has been an invincible team in Croatia for the past few years (<http://nogomet.lzmk.hr/clanak.aspx?id=2704>).

Picture 4 The very first female soccer team of Croatia, ŽNK Merkur



Source: <http://nogomet.lzmk.hr/slika.aspx?id=1120>

3. FIFA AND SOCCER RULES

Soccer rules and regulations are maintained and updated annually by the IFAB⁷. Rules are very important for every game and in order to get a bright picture about what soccer really is, you will be acquainted with the main rules of this game about the soccer pitch, players and required equipment.

3.1 FIFA

FIFA, short for “Fédération Internationale de Football Association”, is a world soccer organization which was established in 1904 in Paris, the capital of France. Before founding of FIFA, IFAB was set up. It is an organization which has the main task to grant every soccer rule before it can be applied. FIFA and IFAB are mutually connected and they work together; IFAB makes the rules and FIFA introduces them in a soccer pitch. Furthermore, FIFA is not allowed to change rules without the mentioned organization (<https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/IFAB>).

According to FIFA, its primary objective is „to improve the game of football constantly and promote it globally in the light of its unifying, educational, cultural and humanitarian values, particularly through youth and development programmes“. But it has other goals and visions too, like „organising inspiring tournaments“ and „building a better future for all through football“ (<http://www.fifa.com/about-fifa/who-we-are/index.html>).

FIFA has been financially supporting growth of the world soccer. FIFA World Cups are held every 4 years and they are gathering various nations to compete. Mostly men's championships get full attention of supporters and fans. There is a lack of information and broadcasts of women's soccer playing. To honour the best players of the world, FIFA presents an association soccer award, known as the FIFA World Player of the Year (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA_World_Player_of_the_Year).

In Europe, there is a governing body of European soccer which is called UEFA. Under UEFA, women compete as members of their national teams all around Europe. Just like FIFA World Cups, UEFA European Women's Championships are held every 4 years (<http://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/video/videoid=2471047.html>).

⁷ International Football Association Board- governing body that determines Laws of the soccer

3.2 Soccer rules

Like any other sport, soccer too has its special rules that must be respected in order to get clearer and, of course, a fair game. The continued text will describe the terrain, the ball, players and equipment and which rules need to be followed in order to observe soccer as a fair play sports game.

3.2.1 The soccer pitch and the ball

Soccer, according to practice, can be mainly played on a grassy pitch, or on a terrain like concrete. In the standard „big“ soccer game, the terrain is approximately 90 m long and approximately 45 m wide, which means that it is always in a shape of a rectangle. At the end of the long part of the pitch are 2 goals, 7.30 m wide and 2.40 m high, which are opposite each other, so that the players could score goals. A goalkeeper is standing by his goal, defending it, and in that way, helping his team to become the ultimate winner. (https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nogometna_pravila)

The ball that enables playing soccer is round and has a diameter of about 80 cm. White balls with various designs are mostly used, but in winter orange balls are taken for a better and clearer view. There are various materials for its outer cover, but in professional soccer the most frequently used material is synthetic leather. It is coated with polyurethane for maximum durability. Also, for the same reason there are multiple layers inside professional balls, which is not the case with cheap ones (<https://www.football-bible.com/soccer-info/what-is-a-soccer-ball-made-of.html>).

Considering that every sport demands to have different equipment, there are also certain rules for those who want to play soccer. A soccer player wears the top and the bottom of the jersey, shin guards, socks that cover the shin guards and soccer boots – footwear that has corks which protect a player from slipping on the terrain. If the game is being played on artificial grass or concrete surface, the players do not use soccer boots but specialized soccer shoes for soccer. All of the equipment is used by both female and male players (<http://www.syossetsoccer.org/home/683808.html>).

Picture 6 *Soccer equipment*



Source <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/originals/ff/27/2f/ff272f998fbefdd48ea8f470fba3247.jpg>

3.3.3 Rules and regulations on the pitch

Starting from the very beginning till the end of a soccer match, there are unique basic rules that makes soccer as it is today. Because soccer was very similar to rugby until the 19th century, there was a need to separate these two sports games so there is one clear difference: you cannot use your hands and play on a soccer pitch. This is valid for all playing positions except for goalkeepers who can defend their goal with every part of their body. There are penalties for players who commit fouls on their opponents or do anything that does not follow main regulations imposed by FIFA.

Soccer match usually lasts for 90 minutes, unless there is extra time which is determined by the main referee. It is the case when matches cannot remain in draw, especially in tournament modes. Furthermore, a soccer match starts in the centre of the pitch which separates two teams, known as the *kick-off*. The kick-off usually means restarting soccer and continuing a match, it is performed after scoring a goal or when there is a half-time. The ball can get out of bounds so it needs to be back in the pitch where it came from: if one team kicks it out of bounds from sideways, the opposing team gets it in their possession at the same spot where it was kicked out, known as the *throw-in*. Besides sideways of the pitch, there are goal lines. When the team who is defending their goal kicks it out of bounds on the goal line, the opposing team gets the ball in their possession from the corner which is called the *corner kick*. There are also penalty kicks and free kicks which are awarded to the team over which fouls and misconducts were committed. The referee decides whether a player who does that on the pitch gets a yellow or a red card, or no card at all. The yellow card is known as a caution because even by getting that card, a player stays in the game. The red card is given to the player who commits very harsh tackles toward his opponent; it also represents ejection of that player for the rest of the match (<http://www.ducksters.com/sports/soccerules.php>).

4. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WOMEN'S AND MEN'S SOCCER

According to some of the female soccer coaches and ex-players, there are a few differences between women's and men's soccer. Coaches said that there might be some physical differences and the ones related to playing styles. Therefore, strength can be a difference when it comes to tackling. Women's game might be a bit slower than the men's but this shouldn't be a problem when it comes to dictating the game. Coaches explain this thing from their point of view: in practice, women's teams still find dictating the game a bit harder than men do.

Hope Powell, an England ex-player and today's coach, presented one more difference between women's and men's soccer by saying: „Women are far more receptive to coaching. They recognize that they can always learn more, while men tend to think initially they already know it all – it takes them a little bit more time to realize that they don't!“ (<http://www.fifa.com/womensworldcup/news/y=2011/m=6/news=differences-between-men-and-women-football-1458638.html>).

„One clear difference that does exist between male and female players across the world is that the males usually start to play football in a serious way much earlier than the females. Even at the age of four or five, boys are often attending football schools and learning the technical and tactical aspects of the game. They are therefore much more prepared than women for the demands of the elite game.“ – Carolina Morace, as the coach of Canada women's national team (<http://www.fifa.com/womensworldcup/news/y=2011/m=6/news=differences-between-men-and-women-football-1458638.html>).

Emma Hayes as the manager of one of the best female soccer clubs of today, Chelsea Ladies, once shouted fearlessly: “No one is going to put women's football down anymore. This is a sport that is to be reckoned with. We are going to get more and more recognition with the more success we have on and off the pitch.” This proves how many women can be strong and motivated towards achieving their goals (<http://www.bbc.com/sport/football/34446258>).

4.1 Prejudices

Considering every sport activity can be affected by a certain prejudice, female soccer too is a subject of various prejudices. They are made by people who consider soccer to be a „male sport“ or “a sport for the strongest only “. Even today, for that reason, female soccer is pushed aside and is in a tricky position.

According to some popular sports magazines, male players dominate. Even when there's a female player mentioned or put in a photo, she is often sexualized and the focus is placed on looking at her as an object. This can be confirmed by the fact that a sports magazine “Sports Illustrated“ has published 716 front pages, of which only 35 include women (http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/contentgroups/sasp/poster_gallery/poster14.pdf).

Referring to the research of the Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation (WSFF) from 2014, women in sport get only 7% of total sports coverage in the media. What is more, an unbelievable number of 4% is related to women's sport in the USA (Shephard, 2016).

From the numbers that will be mentioned later in this chapter, only one thing can be concluded – female soccer is still underrated and is not observed as seriously as male soccer.

4.2 Payments

Why do women get so significantly lower earnings than their male soccer counterparts? The highest paid female soccer players are a motivation for all girls who want to make playing soccer their profession.

According to Forbes⁸, we can take an example of the highest paid female and male soccer players of the year 2015. The numbers are going to join both salaries and sponsor's funds. On one hand, there is Cristiano Ronaldo, one of the best players in the world and the best paid soccer player nowadays, who earned approx. 79 million \$ in the above mentioned year. On the other hand, there is Alex Morgan, the USA women's team soccer star who earned approx. 3 million \$ in the same year.

The highest paid female soccer player in 2017 is Marta, a Brazilian female soccer player who earns more than \$500,000 per season. In comparison, the highest paid male player is Cristiano Ronaldo, a Portuguese national soccer star who earned an enormous 58 million \$

⁸ American media and publishing company

in 2016 (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/christinasettimi/2017/05/26/the-worlds-highest-paid-soccer-players-2017-cristiano-ronaldo-lionel-messi-lead-the-list/#71a7b0b8210e>).

The numbers are clear: they compete in the same sport, on the same professional level; they are one of the best in the ranks in their own national team and club. They train with the same passion and effort but what is different are their earnings.

When it comes to wages of national women's teams, the following figures explain it all: USA Women's team, as the most successful one, gets paid of \$2 million for a winning the World Cup in Canada in 2015. In contrast, Men's team gets an amount of \$8 million for losing in the first round of the tournament (<https://goatsportstalk.com/2015/07/08/u-s-women-on-top-of-the-world-again/>).

Figure 1 *Comparison of USA men's and women's team's pay*



Source:

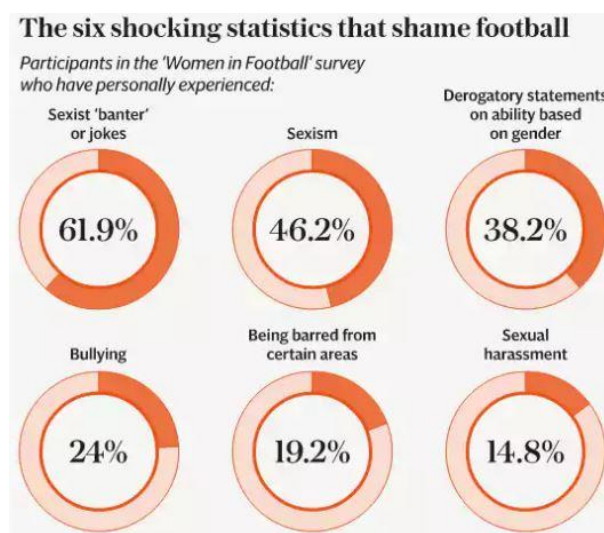
<https://goatsportstalk.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/screen-shot-2015-07-08-at-3-15-24-pm.png?w=768&h=439>

4.3 Statistics of women's position in soccer

To make it easier to understand, the following figure will show the six shocking statistics about how women are treated in soccer. It was published by *Women in Football*, the campaigning organization who conducted this survey. Survey was conducted on more than 500 women who have various roles in the soccer industry.

The majority of the participants in the mentioned survey confided that they have experienced different forms of sexism; nearly 62 % of them experienced tasteless comments and disregards and nearly half of the conducted group happen to struggle against sexism in general. This means that they suffer day by day, but on a professional level, they need to stay focused on the play and give their best. Surely, it is not easy to show all of your potential when you do not have the expected support and when you are considered not so good just because you are a woman and you play a “male sport”. What is more, things can get worse. 24% of them, 120 out of 500 women to be precise, have encountered some kind of bullying whether they are players, coaches or any other staff of the “soccer family” (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/football/2016/03/08/sexism-occurs-daily-in-football-reports-reveals/>).

Figure 2 Statistics of the survey by Women in Football



Source: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/content/dam/football/2016/03/08/pies_trans_NvBQzQNjv4Bqdyv8yiRr2SFzJ4Ti1aDsrPWMezQpt_AE_hJnUTtLY8.PNG?imwidth=1240

5. SUCCESS OF FEMALES IN SOCCER

Despite prejudice, discrimination and earnings they obtain, female soccer players can be great and successful in soccer as well as their male counterparts. Success plays a very important role in the continuation of growth of female soccer.

There are quite a lot of successful female teams which prove that women can turn this sport into a global one. Moreover, the improvement of female soccer in USA, combined with top male players such as Pele, Maradona, and Ronaldo, and teams on continents where soccer was less known in the beginning (Asia, Africa), turned soccer into a truly global sport (Gifford, 2002).

5.1 The most successful women's national teams

The following paragraphs are about to show the success of women in national soccer teams and clubs. Women compete in this game from all around the world. In order to measure one's strength on the pitch, they qualify for the World Cup. As mentioned, World Cups are held every 4 years. There are national teams from Africa, Asia, North and Central America and Caribbean, South America, Oceania and Europe.

5.1.1 U.S Women's National Team

The most successful women's national team nowadays is the USA. In 1985, they played their first official match and they had shown what they can do on a soccer pitch. 1991 is known as the year in which women's soccer got great importance: FIFA started to organize World Cups in soccer for women. The first Women's World Cup was held in China and the winner was the USA. Until then, World Cups were held only for men, starting from 1930 in Uruguay (Nash, 2016).

From then on, USA Women's team has won 3 champion titles in the World Cups. They won the last one in 2015 in Canada (<http://www.fifa.com/womensworldcup/archive/chinapr1991/index.html>).

After that win, Luke Domask, a writer who does reviews of various sports on his site named *Goatsports*, supported the USA Women's team by saying: „Sixteen years ago, there is

no way you're making a Women's Soccer reference to the most competitive soccer league in the world. Indeed, the ladies game has come along in leaps and bounds and with this core group of players hitting their prime, there's no reason not to keep believing they can sustain this dominance" (<https://goatsportstalk.com/2015/07/08/u-s-women-on-top-of-the-world-again/>).

Support for the USA team has no end, even the former President Obama once excitedly pronounced: "Playing like a girl means being the best. That's what American women do. That's what American girls do. That's why we celebrate this team. They've done it with class. They've done it with the right way. They've done it with excitement. They've done with style. We are very, very proud of them" (<http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/12/15/457117175/abby-wambachs-soccer-career-in-8-iconic-moments>).

Picture 7 USA Women's national team



Source: <http://www.stingindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/FIFA.jpg>

5.1.2 Germany

German Women's national team was established by DFB⁹ in 1982. In 1955, female soccer in Germany was banned by the same organization. Firstly, there was a national team of West Germany. After Germany unified, West and East Germany merged and showed up on the World Cup in 1991

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany_women%27s_national_football_team).

According to the latest stats, the most successful European women's national team is Germany. It is a country in the central Europe which provides great opportunities for women who play soccer under their national flag and domestic soccer clubs as well. 2003 and 2007 are the most successful years for German players: they won the World Cup and proved they were going to give the world amazing soccer moments. Since their first show on the European Championship, they won 8 titles of champions in 1989, 1991, 1995, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2009 and 2013. With that kind of an exceptional play, they have deserved to be famous in every way (<https://www.dfb.de/en/national-teams/womens-national-team/>).

Picture 8 *Women's national soccer team of Germany*



Source http://www.uefa.com/MultimediaFiles/Photo/competitions/General/01/57/06/13/1570613_w2.jpg

⁹ DFB- *Deutscher Fußball-Bund*, the German Football Association, the governing body of football in Germany

5.1.3 FIFA World ranking

As mentioned, women's national teams from all over the world compete on FIFA World Cups every 4 years. Starting from 1991, national teams have participated in 7 World Cups which had been held twice in China, Sweden, twice in a row in the USA, Germany and Canada. The USA has been holding their 1st position on the table for a long time; their notable results keep them at the very top of the world soccer. Right behind the USA there are European countries like Germany and France and England as well. The next FIFA World Cup for women will be held in France in 2019 and below in the table are current results of all national teams until September 2017 (<http://www.fifa.com/womens-football/index.html>).

Table 1 *FIFA World ranking*

FIFA/COCA-COLA WORLD RANKING					
Rank	Team		Points	+/-	Positions
1		USA	2104	0	◄►
2		Germany	2077	0	◄►
3		England	2037	2	▲
4		France	2030	-1	▼
5		Canada	2027	-1	▼
6		Australia	2019	1	▲
LAST UPDATE: Friday 01 September 2017					

Source <http://www.fifa.com/womens-football/index.html>

5.2 The most famous female soccer players ever

The following chapter brings some of the best female soccer players who have become noted and appreciated in their native region and all around the world. Although there are more of them, Mia Hamm, Birgit Prinz, Abby Wambach, Marta and Michelle Akers are the women who have brought honour to soccer.

5.2.1 Mia Hamm

Mia Hamm is a retired American soccer player who played for her national team for 17 years. She was born in 1972 and started to play soccer under the US national flag at the age of 15. Hamm is known for her tremendous accomplishment: winning the Women's World Cup in 1991 and 1999, taking Olympic gold medals in 1996 and 2004 and holding the record of a player who had scored most goals under national flags until 2013. Hamm was named FIFA's „World Player of the Year“ twice: in 2001 and 2002.

Sportyghost once wrote about Mia: „One of the most successful and decorated women soccer players, an ambassador and also an icon for the women's game world. Mia Hamm is an obvious inclusion for any discussion for the greatest female soccer players of all time“ (<https://www.sportyghost.com/top-10-famous-female-soccer-players-time/>).

5.2.2 Marta

Marta Vieira da Silva is a Brazilian player who has played in the USA, in Women's soccer club Orlando Pride since April 2017. She was born in 1986 in Alagoas, Brazil. Her professional career started in 2000 at Vasco da Gama, in the popular city of soccer, Rio de Janeiro. From then on, she has been a player of 7 clubs in total. She started to play for Brazilian Women's national team in 2003. She participated in FIFA Women's World Cup which was held in the USA. Marta is known for winning The FIFA World Player of the Year award 5 times in a row, from 2006 to 2010 and by that, she has become the first and last female soccer player who succeeded to get such an honour (<https://www.sportyghost.com/top-10-famous-female-soccer-players-time/>).

Marta is known for another personal achievements like: setting a record of 15 goals, the most World Cup goals that one female player has ever scored, winning the FIFA Women's

World Cup Golden Ball¹⁰ in 2007 and winning the FIFA Women's World Cup Golden Boot¹¹ in the same year, Women's Professional Soccer MVP¹² in 2009 and 2010, Women's Professional Soccer Golden Boot from 2009 to 2011 and many others ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marta_\(footballer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marta_(footballer))).

5.2.3 Birgit Prinz

Birgit Prinz is a retired German player and is considered the best female soccer player in Germany. She was born in 1977 in Frankfurt am Main where she began her professional career. She was a player with a position of an attacker with a great supervision over the pitch; she was fast and her ability to handle the ball was also fantastic. With a total of 13 goals scored in Women's World Cup, she finds herself on the second place amongst top female scorers of that tournament. Her personal records cannot be forgotten: she was declared German's Footballer of the Year for 7 years and she is the first woman who was named FIFA Women's World Player of the Year 3 years in a row: in 2003, 2004 and 2005. What is more, this great player scored 128 goals in 214 matches for her country. She ended her career in 2012 (de León, 2010).

5.2.4 Abby Wambach

Abby Wambach, born in 1980, is a retired American player and one of the best female soccer players ever. In her young days, she played both soccer and basketball, but eventually made her decision to show her tremendous abilities in professional soccer. She was playing a forward and with her height of 180 cm she was a real threat for all of her opponents on the pitch. The University of Florida was a university where Abby showed her enormous skills; when she was a freshman, her abilities led the University to their first title of college championships. Because of her numerous records, Abby finds her spot in the University of Florida Hall of Fame since 2012.

¹⁰ An award that is presented to the best player of the each FIFA World Cup finals

¹¹ An award for the topscorer of the FIFA World Cup

¹² MVP stands for *Most valuable Player*, an award that is presented to the player who has shown the best performance on a soccer pitch in an entire league

Wambach started to play soccer under her national flag in 2001. From then on, this player had started to track records until her final retirement in 2015. In 15 active years of performing, she managed to set notable records for female soccer and soccer world in global. She was honoured by winning the U.S. Soccer Federation's Soccer Athlete of the Year ¹³ award six times. 2012 was notable for her because she was named FIFA's Player of the Year and she helped her national team to win another FIFA World Cup. What is more, Abby managed to reach a position of the world's top scoring international soccer player both for women and men with the unbelievable number of 184 international goals in 2013. Worldwide, she is also known as "The Header Heard Round the World." Along with all this, she is widely known as a LGBT woman who came away with prejudices against sexual orientation. Furthermore, majority of the population consider Abby one of the greatest players ever (<http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/12/15/457117175/abby-wambachs-soccer-career-in-8-iconic-moments>).

5.2.5 Michelle Akers

Michelle Akers is a retired American soccer player born in 1966 in Santa Clara, California. She started her career at the University of Central Florida which is a place where Michelle set her first records. Notable, on August 18, 1985 she scored the very first goal for the national USA Women's team and it was the first appearance of the team ever. In the first ever World Cup in 1991 in China, she showed her domination on the pitch where she scored 10 goals and won the first FIFA's Golden Boot Award. She was playing as a midfielder with a great playmaking skills. In 2002, she was named FIFA Female Player of the Century and she finds her place in the National Soccer Hall of Fame. Also, Akers had an honour to get the FIFA Order of Merit¹⁴ in 1998 and announced her retirement in 2000. Fighting with numerous injuries, this enduring player has remained famous in the world as a fighter and an excellent playmaker (<http://www.soccertimes.com/usteam/roster/women/akers.htm>).

¹³ An award which is given by US Soccer Federations to the American players who were judged best each year. This award started to honour female American players from 1985.

¹⁴ The highest honour which is awarded to people who have made a significant contribution to soccer.

5.3 Where do female Croatian female players stand?

Competitive team sports like soccer, handball, basketball and water polo are the most popular sports in Croatia. Moreover, soccer is the one which occupies most people and which can be referred to as the most popular sport in Republic of Croatia (<http://www.croatia.eu/article.php?lang=1&id=51>).

Unfortunately, when it comes to women's soccer, Croatian girls on the pitch are not very popular. From the social aspect and total coverage in media, female soccer has an unliveable status and girls who are heading to the soccer pitches get hardly any support (<http://www.nogometplus.net/index.php/naslovna/zasto-je-zenski-nogomet-tako-nepopularan-u-hrvatskoj/>).

For an instance, let's take an example of Violeta Baban, one of the best female soccer players in Croatia nowadays. She has been playing for the women's national team for 16 years and she is also a midfielder of ŽNK Osijek, the most successful and rewarded female soccer club in Croatia. She once said that there is a problem persisting in the past few years. National players are fading and there is a huge problem that includes lack of money in women's soccer. Croatian Football Federation, the governing body of Croatian soccer, only covers costs of travelling and girls do not get daily pay checks for playing in the national team. Girls get payments that are earned only by their merit. Shockingly, because of that, they are considered unique in Europe (<http://www.index.hr/sport/clanak/reportaza-iz-osijeka-zbog-reprezentacije-uzimaju-godisnji-a-suker-im-ne-zeli-dati-deset-eura-za-dnevnice/925598.aspx>).

According to the law of sport, every player who plays for a Croatian soccer national team has to obtain daily pay check of 10 €. There is a devastating fact that for girls who have been playing for the national team this pay check was 5 €. Moreover, for the past few years they have failed to make it either. Croatian Football Federation does not really consider female soccer its priority (<http://www.index.hr/sport/clanak/reportaza-iz-osijeka-zbog-reprezentacije-uzimaju-godisnji-a-suker-im-ne-zeli-dati-deset-eura-za-dnevnice/925598.aspx>).

5.3.1 Wages of Croatian women soccer players

Women compete in Croatian Women's First Soccer League and Women's 2nd Soccer League. They also perform for the Women's national team of Croatia. Most of the women who play soccer on a half-professional and professional level in Croatia do not get paid for their performances on the pitch. But even if they do, they can't actually make a lot of money or provide themselves with financial security. Soccer clubs ensure some scholarships, lodging and food for their girls. As mentioned in the previous chapter, girls who play for the Women's national team of Croatia do not even get daily pay checks, which is really humiliating for the Croatian women's soccer. How can female soccer grow and develop if there is no proper support of the most important Croatian soccer organization?

To clarify, a woman who plays in ŽNK Osijek, which has been unbeatable in the past few years in Women's First Soccer League, receives a salary of 1 600 HRK (about 215 €) per month. This salary is not enough to cover all the monthly costs, which brings us to the conclusion that soccer cannot be their only profession. Because of that, most of the girls have to have other jobs in order to cover the costs of living (<https://www.24sata.hr/sport/fenomen-znk-osijek-ajmo-cure-s-1600-kn-u-ligu-prvaka-379809>).

At the same time, the highest paid soccer player in Croatian First Soccer League is El Arbi Hillel Soudani, an Algerian who plays in GNK Dinamo Zagreb and earns about 750 000 HRK (more than 101 000 €) per month (<http://www.goal.com/hr/news/7037/prva-hnl/2016/09/10/27362202/pla%C4%87e-u-hnl-u-evo-koliko-to%C4%8Dno-zara%C4%91uju-najskuplji-igra%C4%8Di-u>).

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, female soccer truly has potential and the predisposition to become a very big segment of sport in general. Although female soccer isn't appreciated enough, they are trying to do their best. Quality, persistent work and passion for the ball are ultimately essential in women's soccer. Both women and men provide interesting and dynamic soccer and it will remain so. Mentioned Mia Hamm, Birgit Prinz, Abby Wambach, Marta and Michelle Akers are one of the players who showed the power of women on the pitch. Their achievements will be remembered for a very long time providing a role model for young players who will follow their footsteps. Relating to the provided insight into the player's financial stimulus, it can be concluded that women's soccer is still unfairly underestimated and does not receive adequate media attention. It is possible that one of the reasons why soccer, even after emancipation of women, is primarily regarded as a male sport is the idea that it is too harsh for females.

Apart from the sociological aspect, women's soccer in Croatia still does not have financial and media support, like it does in more developed countries. When it comes to Croatia, women's presence still isn't a thing people are used to. There is a main issue of lack of money intended for Croatian female soccer. It is not hard to conclude that women of the best female soccer club ever in Croatia with their spectacular performance and results deserve much more. Girls being led with such great passion just want to play soccer and be fairly paid for their profession, nothing more. This is proven by the fact that even though they are limited by their very poor financial support, they continue running on soccer pitches showing their quality.

After all, it will take years and years of work and effort to make women and men equal in this sport. By then, every day women increasingly give their maximum to show what they know: fantastic techniques, scored goals, great defences and improved dribbling skills are some of the most interesting exhibitions they can offer.

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